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TAGS: [SCUL](#) [KISL](#) [KPAO](#) [KDEM](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: BETWEEN EXTREMISTS AND STAR ACADEMY:
ISLAMIC-ORIENTED RADIO STATION TRIES TO REACH YOUTH

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: "Hayat FM" founder and chairman Musa Saket plans to expand his Islamic-oriented radio station's broadcast range from its current central Jordan media markets in Amman and Zarqa to the northern and southern parts of the country in the next few months. His station, which he founded just over two years ago out of concern that Jordanian youth "were not living within sharia," now ranks 4th among 30 private radio stations in Jordan in listenership according to a recent IPSOS study. Saket said his station attempts to instill a moderate Islamic message in Jordan's young people, but feels caught "between extremists and Star Academy" in forging a middle ground. Hayat FM staff attribute their station's rapid growth to the country's desire for a radio station that addresses the social and cultural issues facing Jordanian families from a religious perspective. While Saket is confident the radio station will continue to grow, he said he remains concerned about "Jordanian youth finding the right path" amidst conflicting liberal and conservative social messages they find in the media. END SUMMARY.

"WE WANT YOUTH TO LIVE WITHIN SHARIA"

¶2. (C) Hayat ("Life") FM (104.7 FM) Chairman of the Board Musa Saket, General Manager Mohammad Saraira, and Media Department Chief Khader al-Mashayekh told emboff on May 14 that their Islamic-oriented radio station will grow significantly within the next few months. Currently broadcasting in Amman and Zarqa, the station plans to be on the air in Irbid and Aqaba, the major markets in the north and south of the country respectively, within the next few months. Saket, an engineer and successful businessman with no prior media experience, said he founded the station in February, 2006 out of concern "that there was nothing on the radio to lead our youth on the right path." After working in industrial engineering for 12 years, Saket said he "wanted to encourage radio listeners to live a balanced, moral, and responsible life through the Koran." Devoting 30% of their programming to religious instruction and the remainder to social and cultural issues- often from a religious perspective- Hayat FM's staff agree they created the station "because we want Jordanian youth to live within the sharia." Criticizing religious extremists and liberal media outlets alike, Saket said his station struggles to define a middle ground between extremist voices and what he views as the sex, violence, and alcohol use that is becoming more pervasive on media outlets like the Lebanese Broadcasting Company (LBC) and the Middle East Broadcasting Company (MBC).

"SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE RADIO"

¶3. (SBU) Hayat FM was established as a for-profit radio station by al-Salam Audio Media Company on February 13, 2006. The station began with eight employees but now boasts more than 50. Its listenership has also grown quickly, ranking 4th among 30 private Jordanian radio stations and in the top ten among all radio stations in Jordan according to a recent IPSOS study. General Manager Mohammed Saraira stressed that while the station seeks a broad audience, it focuses on

imparting a "socially responsible message" to youth and their parents. In addition to dedicating nearly a third of their programming to religious instruction, the station hosts a variety of social, cultural, and educational programs meant to instill social responsibility in Jordanian youth and families.

14. (C) While not overtly religious, many of these "socially responsible" shows also frequently feature religious themes. "Of course, all of our messages are endorsed by the Koran," Saket explained. Stressing that his station "stays out of politics," Saket declared "we are the only station following our model of programming." The station's staff stresses that Hayat FM "strives to be different." "We are the first in Jordan, and perhaps others in Jordan and the region will follow us," Saket said. In an attempt to underscore its leadership in moderate Islamic programming, the station recently hosted a forum for journalists and academics entitled "Islamic Speech and the Media." Al-Mashayekh stated that the station has also begun to receive attention from outside Jordan, with al-Arabiya television recently doing a feature story on Hayat FM calling it the "first Islamic, educational, and social local radio station."

15. (C) The station's programming reflects its religious focus. For example, the station runs a program entitled "The House of Eve," which discusses living "the ideal family life with a focus on women and their role in the household and raising children." Another program entitled "Stop for a Moment," addresses youth issues including "finding a job, what youth do in coffeeshops, youth as a model of leadership, and the youth's childish personality." Both programs

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frequently cite religious text. The station also runs one English language youth-oriented program entitled "Youth Forum" each week which elicits comments from young Muslims in places as far away as Chicago and Kuala Lumpur listening to the station on the internet. Hayat FM also regularly sponsors social responsibility campaigns, running programming on topics like education for the poor and the dangers of smoking.

16. (C) While the station's staff maintain they are "not political," Hayat FM's call-in shows frequently host government officials like Minister of Environment Khaled Irani and the head of the Social Security Corporation Omar Razzaz to listen to citizens' frustrations. "We are not political, but at the same time our station, particularly our call-in shows, provide a valve for our listeners," Saket claimed. Stating that Jordan "faces a lot of economic challenges right now," Saket said the talk shows on his station and several other call-in shows currently popular on Jordanian radio "allow people to get their feelings off their chest in a peaceful way." Saket added that the GOJ has been supportive of the station's programming. He said that his station broadcast live from polling stations in last year's municipal and parliamentary elections, and spoke to voters who expressed frustrations with technical difficulties at some polling places on the air. "Even after we broadcast these negative comments about the polling process, I received a call from the Director of the Audio Visual Commission Hussein Bani Hani commending us on the way we covered the elections," Saket explained. "I have not faced any intervention from the government in the programming we have run," he concluded.

WORRIED ABOUT THE FUTURE: TAKING AIM AT STAR ACADEMY

17. (C) Despite his station's growth, the Boston University-educated Saket said he is "not always confident" about the "spiritual future" of Jordan's youth. "There are a lot of challenges for young people right now, to live their lives in a moderate way according to our religion," he said. While criticizing Islamic extremists and acknowledging the danger that some disaffected young people could drift towards their

message, Saket reserved his harshest criticism for more liberal media outlets. "What MBC is broadcasting these days goes way too far," he declared, expressing concern about images of sex, alcohol, and drug use in the movies and programs that run on the popular satellite station. He also singled out for criticism LBC's Star Academy, in which young male and female aspiring artists mingle freely. "We have a responsibility to our young people, and right now we in the media are not doing enough for them," he declared.

18. (C) The station receives credit from those supporting Islamic-oriented media outlets, with many citing the station's success as proof that a void exists in Jordan's media for Islamic-oriented radio and television stations that go beyond broadcasting religious instruction. Before entering a meeting with Hayat FM's management regarding possible collaboration, Marwan Shehadeh, the editor of the moderate Islamist website Islamouna, praised the station's efforts at addressing social problems from an Islamic perspective. "This is a good station and it is doing good work," he said. "This is really the only moderate Islamic radio station speaking to young people, and that's what makes it so important," Tareq Farah, a contributor to Jordan Television and Iranian-backed Press Television, added. Faisal Baddawi, a Saudi religious studies student attending university in Amman, said that he and his friends enjoy listening to the station "because it adds to our studies of Islam. Of course we listen to Hayat FM, it is excellent."

19. (C) Saket concluded that while praise of his station is gratifying, he worries that radio and other media are not doing enough to direct a moderate, Islamic message to Jordan's young people. He and his staff will watch closely whether the station's fan base grows when it expands to Irbid and Aqaba this summer. "It is difficult for any young person to see what is happening on their television sets and still find the right religious path. I was in business and never in my wildest dreams did I think I would open a radio station. But when I saw that there was nothing positive for young people on the air, I decided I had to do this."

Hale